

LB/HM

January 2021

John Muir House
Haddington
East Lothian
EH41 3HA
Tel 01620 827827

Dear Parent / Carer,

Now that the new term is well underway, I wanted to write to you with a further update. This is not the way we were hoping to begin this year, but our schools have been preparing for the possibility of further remote learning since last year and you can be reassured that we are doing all that we can to support our children and young people. I am very proud of everything that our schools are achieving despite the restrictions that are in place.

On Tuesday 19th January 2021, the First Minister provided a further update on the reopening of schools. She announced that given that community transmission of COVID-19 remains high, schools would not reopen until at least the middle of February and that this will be reviewed on 2nd February. We are monitoring the situation carefully and we are also continuing to plan for the return of schools either in full or in stages as soon as it is safe to do so and we are permitted to reopen as directed by the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government has asked that Local Authorities continue to provide in-school places for children of keyworkers and for vulnerable children and that all other children should continue with remote learning. Given the uncertainty around the spread of the new variant, we have also been asked to keep numbers of children and staff in buildings as low as possible. We understand that the current situation is very challenging for families and we will continue to do all that we can to provide support whilst also ensuring we comply with Public Health advice and the requirements set by the Scottish Government.

We are working closely with schools to make sure that they are able to provide effective remote learning and teaching. Our schools are best placed to know what will work for learners and we have encouraged them to continue to seek your views on what is working well and what more we can do.

It is important to emphasise that remote learning is not only digital and online learning and it is not intended to replicate face to face in-school teaching. Our staff are working hard to ensure they maintain regular contact with their children, for example through Google Meets, Assemblies and the use of live and recorded lessons as appropriate. We want to ensure that the remote learning experience is fair and equitable and there is no expectation placed upon schools that teachers will provide 'live learning' lessons online for the full duration of a school's normal opening hours. We are encouraging our schools to offer a range of activities that also mean that your child does not need to have a full day of screen time and that opportunities for activity and fresh air can also be built in. Whilst we know that you will be keen to provide the best possible ongoing support to your children, we are not expecting you to teach them as though they were in class. Many of you will be dealing with other challenges, for example if you are also working from home (as are school staff who may also be providing remote learning and supporting in-school provision). We are very grateful for your continued support in encouraging your child to engage with their learning. This will support the full-time return to school whenever this can happen.

Some further tips:

- Take a measured approach to remote learning at home. Do what is achievable - learning activities can be worked on at a convenient time for families, not just between 9am and 3pm each week day.
- Monitor your child's time on electronic devices where possible by creating a timetable with your child and identifying times for online and offline learning during the day.
- When possible, use a variety of activities such as games, art, music, play and reading to help break up the day into manageable chunks of learning time for children.
- Try to ensure that your child is getting opportunities for breaks and time outside for exercise and fresh air. These opportunities will have a positive impact upon their readiness to learn at home.
- Allow your child to take the opportunity to extend their learning beyond their remote learning tasks by supporting their curiosity and creativity in areas that inspire them.
- Wherever possible, try to maintain normal routines for your child going to bed and getting up in the morning.
- Keep in touch with your child's school if you have any questions about the remote learning that is set for your child.

For parents with students in S4, 5 and 6

We know that this is a very anxious time for you and your families, especially with the cancellation of exams and an extension to school closures until at least mid-February. The National Qualifications Group are considering a number of options regarding the arrangements for students who are working towards National Qualifications, including arrangements for assessment. We are awaiting further advice on these matters and in the meantime, we have been asked to ensure that the remote learning focus is on providing quality learning and teaching that supports each student's progress in their learning. Our teachers are working hard to adjust their course content for remote learning purposes and our schools will provide further information once the SQA update is available.

Finally, please be assured that our staff are working incredibly hard to provide the very best for your children and we ask for your patience and support at what is a challenging time for everyone. In the meantime, if you have any questions or concerns regarding the remote learning provided for your child, you should contact your child's school in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,



Lesley Brown
Executive Director Education and Children's Services